

NO BLOOD IN THE WATER: THE LEGAL AND GENDER
CONSPIRACIES AGAINST COUNTESS ELIZABETH
BATHORY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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This thesis explains and discusses the conspiracies reported against the Hungarian noblewoman, Countess Elizabeth Bathory, regarding her confinement and the arrest of her accomplices in December 1610. The conspiracies state that the Countess was unjustly targeted and charged not because she was guilty of the deaths of several dozen girls from torture, but because she represented a threat to the Hapsburg Empire due to her wealth, her political influence, and her widowhood. This thesis explores the rationality of these two conspiracies using historical context regarding the position of noblewomen in Central and Eastern Europe and the function and use of the Early Modern judicial system. It concludes that there was no gender based conspiracy against the Countess because Early Modern Hungary did not see wealthy widows as a threat. Bathory did not seriously violate her expected roles and duties while a wife, widow, or a mother, and at her arrest had only a fraction of the power and wealth she held previously. Additionally the trial against her accomplices was conducted under standard Early Modern judicial procedures, including the use of torture to obtain a confession.

PREVIEW

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Fulfillment of the Requirements
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This thesis is dedicated to Daniel Bledsaw, my amazing and wonderful husband. Without his constant support and encouragement, I would never have finished this thesis. I could not ask for a more understanding, compassionate, and brilliant partner. Additional thanks go out to my family and friends for their interest in the progress and information in this thesis – even if they did not always understand it. Finally thanks go to my committee members for agreeing to help with this thesis. My thanks and gratitude goes out to all of you.

R.L.B.

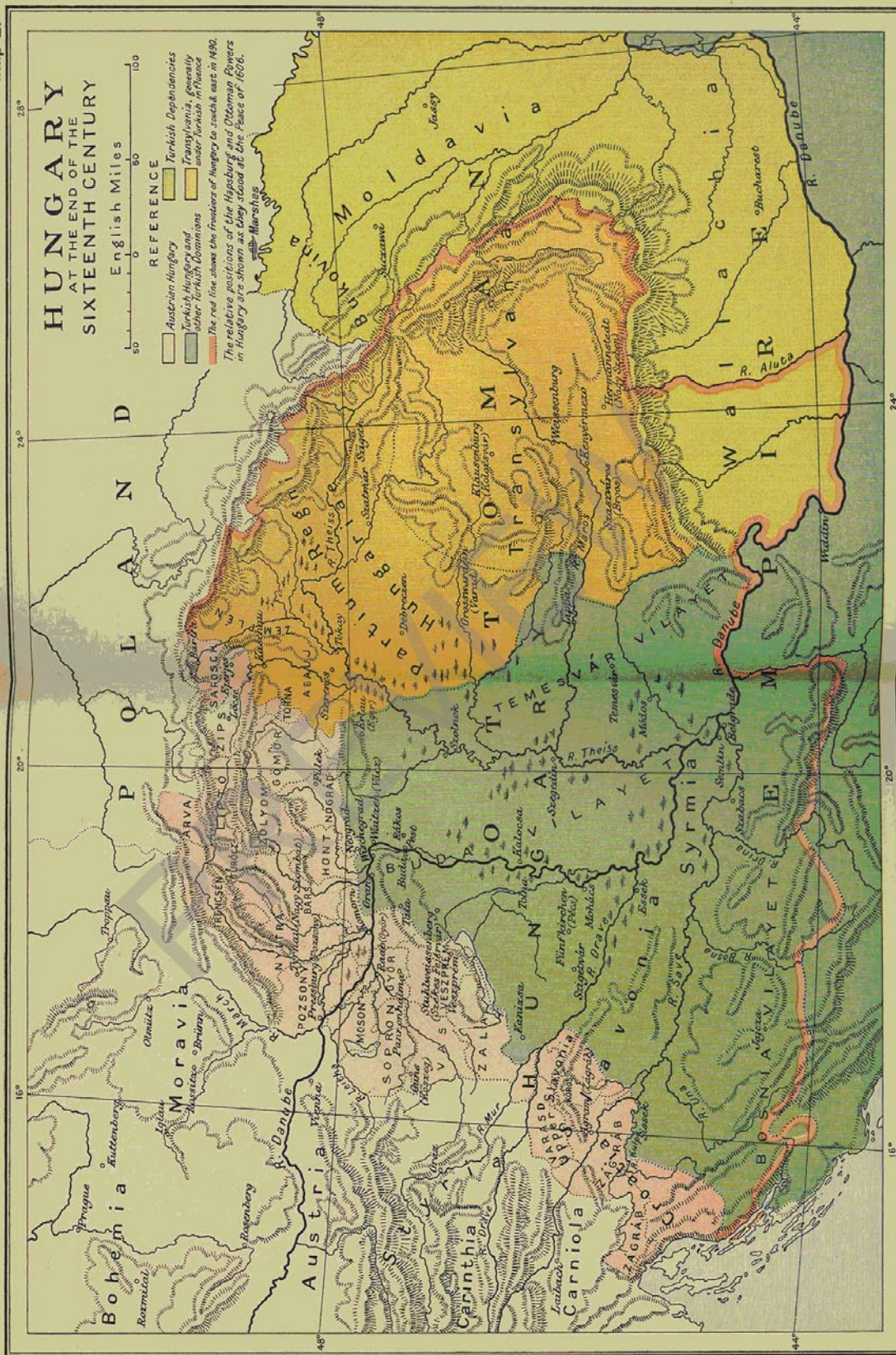
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TIMELINE

- 1514
An anti-feudalist revolt is put down in Hungary
- 1517
The *Tripartitum* becomes the law of the land, enforcing further restrictions on serfs and detailing the rights of nobles
- 1526
The Battle of Mohacs and the death of King Louis II
- 1527
King John I and King Ferdinand I are both elected as King of Hungary by the Diet
Civil War
- 1538
John and Ferdinand sign a treaty that names Ferdinand John's heir
- 1540
John I dies, his son, John II named King
Hungary is divided into three parts: Royal Hungary, Ottoman Hungary, Principality of Transylvania
- 1560
Elizabeth Bathory is born
- 1571
Francis Nadasdy is given first choice of Elizabeth as wife
Elizabeth Bathory and Francis Nadasdy are engaged
- 1575
Elizabeth Bathory and Francis Nadasdy are married
Elizabeth is given Castle Cjeste as a dower
- 1578
Francis Nadasdy leaves on his first campaign against the Ottomans
- 1585
Elizabeth Bathory gives birth to Anna Nadasdy
Two more daughters follow, exact year unknown
- 1591
Fifteen Years War begins
Secret burials led by Elizabeth begin
- 1596
Andrew Nadasdy was born (died in infancy)
- 1598
Paul Nadasdy was born

- 1601 Anna Durvulia becomes friend and companion to Elizabeth
Francis returns home from war gravely ill
- 1602 Rumors begin to circulate about murders of servant girls serving Elizabeth
- 1604 Francis dies of unknown disease
- 1605 Elizabeth's brother dies
Elizabeth retires to Castle Cjesthe
Bocskai Rebellion against the Hapsburgs begins
- 1606 Bocskai Rebellion ends
Fifteen Years War ends
- 1608 Matthias II coroneted King of Hungary and Holy Roman Emperor
- 1609 Anna Durvulia dies of a stroke
Elizabeth opens a *gynaeceum*
George Thurzo is elected Palatine
Matthias II orders Thurzo to investigate Elizabeth for murder
- 1610 Investigation of Elizabeth goes from March-July
Thurzo makes a deal with Paul Nadasdy, Imre Megyeri, and sons-in-law to arrest Elizabeth, but keep her from going to trial
Thurzo confronts Elizabeth with the evidence against her on Christmas Eve,
Elizabeth claims innocence
Thurzo leads a raid on Castle Cjesthe on New Year's Eve, places Elizabeth under house arrest, arrests her accomplices
- 1611 Ilona Jo, Janos Fiziko, and Dorottya Szentes are executed
Katalin Beneczky is imprisoned for life, later released
Matthias II demands Elizabeth is brought to trial until 1613
- 1614 Elizabeth Bathory dies at the age of 55



INTRODUCTION

THE LADY ONLY WORE CRIMSON:

ELIZABETH BATHORY

AND HER LEGEND

Serial killer. Sadist. Mad woman. Vampire. Werewolf. Countess Elizabeth Bathory has been called all of these names and more over the course of history for her crimes involving the brutal torture and murder of an unknown number of young women and girls. After a raid of her castle, Cjesthe, on December 29, 1610, by Palatine George Thurzo, the Countess' sons-in-law, and her son's legal guardian and tutor, she was confined to her rooms while the four servants who had assisted her were tried and executed for their part in the murders. Officially Countess Bathory was charged with the deaths of eighty girls, but the total number of victims will never be conclusively known. It could range between fifty, the highest number recalled by her oldest accomplice, Ilona Jo, to six hundred and fifty, a number claimed by Suzannah, a peasant witness during preparation for a trial that never happened.¹ Still proclaiming her innocence while under effective house arrest, the Countess died at the approximate age of fifty-four in mid to late August 1614. After her death the story of her murders was locked away and lost for

¹ Kimberly Craft, *Infamous Lady: The True Story of Countess Erzsebet Bathory* (Lexington:Kimberly Craft, 2009), 140, 161; Tony Thorne, *Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of Elisabeth Bathory* (London: Bloomberg Press, 1997), 52; Raymond T. McNally, *Dracula was a Woman: In Search of the Bloody Countess of Transylvania* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1983), 79; Valentine Penrose, *The Bloody Countess*, trans. Alexander Trocchi (London: Colder and Boyors, 1970), 168.

nearly a century, though it continued to exist in the stories and legends of the common people around Cjestehe.

Because she existed mostly in folklore for over a century, very little scholarly attention was paid to the Countess. She was relegated to the netherworld of true crime writers and the hyperactive imaginations of gothic novelists. Depending on the location, the Countess was either a celebrity for her infamy or for her victimhood. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, she became a particularly popular figure for the evils of foreign oppression and gender based conspiracy in Hungary. Blogs of fans fixated on early 1980s research comparing what happened to her and her accomplices to the show trials of the Communist era.² The interpretation was exaggerated to make her the personification of Hungarian suffering under Communism, and therefore particularly attractive to Hungarian national pride and scholarship. This reinterpretation of the Countess is popular in Eastern Europe, but less so elsewhere.

In the West, Bathory found her way into popular, or at least non-academic, biographies, true crime stories and novels, but she was little more than a gruesome anecdote in academia. This has been not only unfortunate, but a missed opportunity to analyze a case study of power, womanhood, and justice in Early Modern Hungary.

Although gaps exist in the case, the questioning of the witnesses -- over three hundred of them -- were documented, as were Palatine Thurzo's legal deviations. Rather than ignoring the case because it was so eagerly adopted by folklore, the case of Countess

² This list of blogs is by no means final or complete, but intended to give the reader a starting place. Szegard Bori, <http://www.jovonk.info/2012/02/13/bathory-erzsebet-tragikus-sorsa-2>; Susan Nernath Vanyi, http://hetek.hu/hatter/201002/bathory_veres_legendaja; <http://www.nagybanya.ro/reszletes-cikkid-1538.htm>; [http://hirek.oldal.info/hir/2010/02/11/3322616/Báthory véres legendája/y2010/m02/d11](http://hirek.oldal.info/hir/2010/02/11/3322616/B%C3%A1thory_v%C3%A9res_legend%C3%A1ja/y2010/m02/d11); http://anapologiaforcountesserzebetbathory.blogspot.com/2012_05_01_archive.html.

Bathory should illustrate how Early Modern justice conventionally functioned in Eastern Europe outside the parameters of witch hunts (which were a gross abuse of legal and social authority regardless of location.) It also provides insight into an aristocrat's place in Eastern and Central Europe, particularly in the legal system, marriage, widowhood, and medicine.³ Women and femininity were by no means considered equal to men and masculinity in Eastern Europe, but there was more appreciation for stronger, assertive, women considered oddities in the west. But first, Bathory's case has to be put into social and historical context.

The main purpose of this thesis will be to discuss Countess Elizabeth Bathory within a historical and cultural framework rather than the sensationalist, true crime, and occult lenses through which she was viewed in previous works. Specifically it will reject arguments that Bathory was targeted for persecution because she was a wealthy and powerful widow. Contemporary and modern works on the construction of womanhood in Eastern Europe counter this perception.⁴ The fear of powerful single women and widows was far more present in Western Europe than in the East. Widows were an accepted part

³ Although Hungary is set solidly in Central Europe presently, I have chosen to refer to it as Eastern although such a designation smacks of Cold War mentality. I have chosen to do so because for much of the 16th century, Hungary was Eastern Europe since Muscovy was largely agreed to be the limits of Europe. Additionally, the Holy Roman Empire controlled Central Europe and while Hungary was ruled by Hapsburgs, it was not part of the Holy Roman Empire.

⁴ Sharon L. Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1-2; Teresa A. Meade, "Structures and Meanings in a Gendered Family History," in *A Companion to Gender History* ed. Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 65; Nancy Shields Kollman, "Self, Society, and Gender in Early Modern Europe" in *Gender History*, Meade and Wiesner-Hanks, 360-361; Cissie Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), 22-23; Sharon D. Michalove, "Equal Opportunity? The Education of Aristocratic Women, 1450-1540," in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999), 51; Maria Bogucka, *Women in Early Modern Polish Society Against the European Background*. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 178; Frances E. Dolen, "Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern England," in *Gender, Power, and Privilege in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jessica Munns and Penny Richards (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 8; Ian Madean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 6.

of life, indeed the best time of a woman's life -- particularly if they were wealthy and noble. Finally, it will also discredit the long held belief that the investigation of Bathory and the trial of her four accomplices was illegal or in anyway similar to the show trials of the Communist era. Letters between family members and Palatine Thurzo revealed a preceding agreement to avert a trial. This was to avoid actual sentencing, rather than a political conspiracy to deprive her of her noble rights. Thurzo gathered evidence according to the Early Modern Hungarian legal code, up to and including his use of torture to gain a confession. The modern understanding of torture within the Early Modern justice system was skewed by its excessive use during witch hunts and religious persecutions. The use of judicial torture was considered necessary and expected to ensure a proper trial under the inquisitional system.

Works on Bathory divide into three groups: the early works, the later works, and true crime. The early works focused on the sensationalism of her story.⁵ Specifically delighting in repeating and furthering rumors of the Countess bathing in blood to maintain her beauty, these focused more on the horrible nature of her crimes rather than on the woman herself. Many of these early works had various agendas, were part of travel logs, or were based entirely on the inflated stories of peasants and not any academic methodology.

⁵ John Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania; With Remarks on their Condition, Social, Political, and Economical* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850), 49-51; Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Book of Werewolves: Being an Account of a Terrible Superstition* (New York: New York Causeway Books, 1973), 139-141; Penrose, *Bloody Countess*, 9.

The first monograph on Bathory was written in 1760 by the Jesuit scholar Brother Laszlo, who discovered the transcripts for the accomplices' trial and summarized them.⁶ His manuscript was the first to include the bathing-in-blood-for-youth element which became the cornerstone of the Bathory mythology. The obvious question was why add this to his manuscript? Though largely up for speculation, Laszlo likely saw the chance to use Bathory to address issues during his lifetime regarding religion and fledgling ideas of nationalism. Bathory was a Protestant who held power before the Counter-Reformation had much of an impact in Hungary, while Laszlo was a Catholic writing for a Catholic monarchy, the Hapsburgs. By the time Laszlo wrote, many aristocratic families had converted back to Catholicism to gain favor within the Hapsburg court. Further demonizing any Protestant faith stymied any possible converts. Re-conversion was a strong possibility, since at the time he was writing, Hungary, Austria and other Eastern European countries were in the throws of both vampire paranoia and rebellions against the Hapsburg monarchy. Laszlo writing and publishing a manuscript which portrayed a Hungarian noble as a diabolical and overly cruel creature fed into already present vampire fears of the time as well as damaged the proto-nationalistic pride of Hungarians.

Over the course of the nineteenth century the Western world received more snippets of the legend of Countess Bathory from religious persons and from popular culture. Michael Wagner, a German scholar, wrote a brief entry on the Countess in his own travelogue which was quoted in its entirety by Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould in his 1865 book, *The Book of Werewolves: Being an Account of a Terrible Superstition*. The entry on Bathory was included as part of a discussion on how some people simply

⁶ Penrose, *Bloody Countess*, 7-8; Thorne, *Countess Dracula*, 7; Craft, *Infamous Lady*, 189; McNally *Dracula was a Woman*, 11.

enjoyed the suffering and pain of others. In no way were Wagner or Baring-Gould suggesting or insinuating that Bathory was a werewolf. The text, quoted in full below, repeated the myth of bathing in blood, but added that she was driven to do it to please her husband and for her own vanity. The total killed was brought up to six hundred and fifty from Brother Laszlo's six hundred, which he arrived at after totaling up the number that the witnesses claimed.⁷ Again, however, the focus was less on the Countess herself and more on the description of her crimes and the motivation for them.

Elizabeth ----- was wont to dress well in order to please her husband, and she spent half the day over her toilet. On one occasion, a lady's maid saw something wrong in her head-dress, and as a recompense for observing it, received such a severe box on the ears that the blood gushed from her nose, and spirited on to her mistress's face. When the blood drops were washed off her face, her skin appeared much more beautiful – whiter and more translucent on the spots where the blood had been.

Elizabeth formed the resolution to bathe her face and her body in human blood so as to enhance her beauty. Two old women and a certain Fitzko assisted her in her undertaking. This monster used to kill the luckless victims, and the old women caught the blood, in which Elizabeth was wont to bathe at the hour of four in the morning. After the bath she appeared more beautiful than before.

She continued this habit after the death of her husband (1604) in the hopes of gaining new suitors. The unhappy girls who were allured to the castle, under the plea that they were to be taken into service there, were locked up in a cellar. Here they were beaten till their bodies were swollen. Elizabeth not unfrequently tortured the victims herself; after she changed their clothes which dripped with blood, and then renewed her cruelties. The swollen bodies were then cut with razors.

Occasionally she had the girls burned, and then cut up, but the great majority were beaten to death. At last her cruelty became so great, that she would stick needles into those who sat with her in her carriage, especially if they were of her own sex. One of her servant girls she stripped naked, smeared her with honey, and so drove her out of the house. When she was ill, and could not indulge her cruelty, she bit a person who came near her sick bed as though she were a wild beast. She caused, in all the death of 650 girls, some in Tscheitia, on the neutral ground, where she had a cellar constructed for this purpose; others in different localities; for murder

⁷ McNally, *Dracula was a Woman*, 13.

and bloodshed became with her a necessity. When at last the parents of lost children could no longer be cajoled, the castle was seized, and the traces of the murders were discovered. Her accomplices were executed, and she was imprisoned for life.⁸

Although Baring-Gould intended not to do anything more than introduce the existence of sadists, Wagner's short piece cleanly laid out the main points of the Bathory myth; vanity, cruelty, and noble power abuse. Additionally, Wagner outlined the basic tortures used against the girls. All of these elements appear in other biographical works on Bathory with increasing detail and research.

Around the same time, John Paget's two part travelogue on Hungary and Transylvania was published. In it, he described his trip to visit the Castle Cjeste and recounted in simple terms the story his guide told him. His guide's story was similar to Wagner's account, though it did not go into detail about the methods of killing. Paget claimed they were too horrible to recount to the refined Western audience for whom he wrote. He also lowered the body count to three hundred.⁹

Up until this point, very little of the Countess' personality or personal habits, aside from sadistic ones, had been written about. In 1904 R. A. von Elsborg's work changed that. Considered by McNally to be the best biography on Bathory, it was based entirely on the stories of peasants and folklore of the area.¹⁰ It was in von Elsborg's text that accusations of adultery, lesbianism, and illegitimate children were first brought into the fold of the story of Bathory.¹¹ It remains unclear why von Elsborg included these pieces in his work, but most likely over the three hundred years since the Countess' death

⁸ Baring-Gould, *Book of Werewolves*, 139-141.

⁹ Paget, *Hungary*, 50.

¹⁰ McNally, *Dracula Was a Woman*, x; Craft, *Infamous Lady*, 30-31.

¹¹ Craft, *Infamous Lady*, 31.

her story was engorged with the occult, mysticism that was the fin-de-siècle, and anything else that would have made her the ideal villain. Since his source was only folktales, the accuracy is questionable, but many of his assertions remain part of the legend. For decades the West saw Bathory only through plays, stories, and operas. The result was a skewed view of not only Bathory, but the old Eastern European ways in general.

Half a century after von Elsburg, the Western world finally had an academic resource on the Countess presented to them in French and English, though the English translation would not appear until the early 1970s. Valentine Penrose, like the other early works, accepted the Countess' guilt wholesale and without question in her book, *The Bloody Countess*. She also accepted that Bathory was either a lesbian or a bisexual who had an incestuous relationship with her Aunt Klara (who herself was supposedly a murderess and sexually insatiable), and that she spent much of the time her husband was away fighting the Turks having the sort of parties that Roman emperors dreamed of.¹² Penrose was not a historian, but rather a poet and writer. While this made some of her conclusions questionable and her prose a flowery chore to get through, Penrose was the first Western writer to use the primary source material for her book. She supported and expanded on many unconfirmed details of the Countess, but she refuted the myth of bathing in blood.¹³ She focused more on the crimes and spent much of her work highlighting the sexual and mystical parts of the legend. Therefore, although Penrose did use primary source material to debunk stories of vampirism and blood bathing, she exacerbated the rumors of sexual infidelity and perversion.

¹² Penrose, *Bloody Countess*, 26, 31.

¹³ Penrose, *Bloody Countess*, 67, 117.

Penrose also provided a pseudo-psychological reason for why Bathory would lash out at young, pretty, women. Rather than doing so to gather and bathe in their blood, she did so because she was driven astrologically. Penrose argued that the time of her birth placed her under a masculine sign, which excited her lesbian tendencies and caused her to lash out against small, weak, things.¹⁴ Although largely insupportable because of its basis in astrology, Penrose's explanation for Bathory's actions must be given credit for taking the focus off lycanthropy or vampirism. Her return to Brother Laszlo's monograph and the transcript of the trial as sources set her apart from the other early works in regards to methodology and certainly inspired later biographers; however, her focus on the sensational elements and her astrology based explanation for the crimes prevented her from fully separating her work from the earlier ones.

Beginning with Brother Laszlo and ending with Penrose, the early works all share specific traits and arguments regarding the Bathory myth. First, all of them accept her guilt without question and without a need (or maybe desire) to place her actions within historical context. Secondly, their construction of the Countess was simple: she was cruel and evil, a personification of all that was wrong with nobility. There was no discussion of conspiracy or show trials, and there was no attempt to make her into a victim or a much maligned national hero. The early works focused solely on her crimes and her torture methods.

The main distinction between early works on Bathory and later ones was that later works brought some social context into her story; they began to focus more on Bathory's

¹⁴ Penrose, *Bloody Countess*, 26. For those who do know astrology and horoscopes, Bathory's birthday on August 7, 1560 would make her a Leo, which is indeed a masculine fire sign. Of course this would also have to mean that horoscope signs have any kind of real bearing on the actions of people, which has not been proven.

position as a wife and mother rather than her well established crimes. It would be the later works which truly introduced accusations of conspiracy regarding her case. Later works employed a stronger academic methodology by repeatedly returning to the trial documents and working to uncover lost letters to or from Bathory from the archives of the Nadasdy, the Batthyany, and the Thurzo families. With these new letters and documents, later authors were able to create a wider picture of the Countess's world and how she may have lived -- though some with more success than others. Many of these works relied on untranslated research material by Hungarian and other Eastern European scholars as secondary source material. Through these later works, English readers were given insight into her cultural and position in Hungary.

The first of these later works, *Dracula was a Woman: In Search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania*, written by the historian Raymond T. McNally, appeared in 1983. McNally's involvement in the story of Countess Bathory was actually a step back from rescuing her from the world of vampires and werewolves. McNally was at the time the eminent scholar for all things Dracula, from Vlad to Abraham Stoker himself.¹⁵ His previous four books all dealt with the subject of vampires in Eastern Europe, or sought to correlate the inspiration of the literary blood-sucking count with the Wallachian war lord, Vlad the Impaler. Attaching his name to the Bathory case, therefore, created the impression that there was truth to the stories of vampirism. This was not helped when

¹⁵ Dr. Raymond T. McNally had published four books on Dracula and Bram Stoker before his book on Bathory. A professor in Russian and Eastern Studies, McNally taught at Boston College for several decades.

McNally misunderstood Baring-Gould's inclusion of her in his book and reported that she was considered a werewolf.¹⁶

Like Penrose, MacNally rejected the legend of her bathing in blood, but supported the stories of sexual sadism, affairs, lesbianism, and an illegitimate child. His sources for all of these stories were questionable. He presented folklore as scholarly evidence, while failing to do so in a way that future researchers could replicate. He claimed that the story of Bathory's illegitimate child was recorded in detail in Ursula Nadasdy's letters, but no such evidence was found – or even mentioned – by any other authors.¹⁷ He argued that she was driven to perform the cruel and shocking murders because of revenge against her overbearing mother-in-law,¹⁸ which was rejected by later authors largely on the basis that not only were Bathory's own parents dead before she was married, but so were her in-laws.¹⁹ In short, McNally wrote a book on a topic he knew very little about, and presented his own opinion as supporting evidence.

McNally's main contribution, however, was his introduction of the idea of a political conspiracy against the Countess. His argument made the loan Francis gave to King Matthias II more important to Bathory's life than previous authors, since the debt made the crown politically interested in her downfall. An additional reason to seek out her downfall was her relation to Gabor Bathory, King of Poland. McNally rejected the idea that she was targeted by Matthias because of her religion, since the church gave up the chance to question her about witchcraft.²⁰ He also established that there was a family

¹⁶ McNally, *Dracula was a Woman*, 13.

¹⁷ McNally, *Dracula was a Woman*, 29.

¹⁸ McNally, *Dracula was a Woman*, 29-30.

¹⁹ Thorne, *Countess Dracula*, 87; Craft *Infamous Lady*, 30-31.

²⁰ McNally, *Dracula was a Woman*, 61, 79.

agreement to protect her person and property, but did not successfully connect this with the inconsistent application of legal procedure in her case.²¹ Instead he claimed that the reasons for her arrest were unknown while at the same time maintaining that Thurzo had enough evidence to convict her, despite, as later authors noted, a majority of the evidence being hearsay or gossip.²² Like Penrose, McNally used primary sources, such as the testimony given by the accomplices, but which source correlated with which evidence was up to the reader to guess, making his entire book questionable, confusing, and impossible to confirm. Additionally, most of his bibliography was not about Bathory, but rather Dracula, vampire legends, and werewolves. While he identified an intriguing political twist to Bathory's story, his book was far more successful at dragging Bathory back to the nineteenth century plays and stories which labeled her a vampire than providing the academic community with motivation to regard her case seriously.

While McNally favored a political conspiracy, Tony Thorne preferred one based on gender. He was far more successful in providing useful information about Bathory for English readers. Thorne's book, *Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of the Blood Countess*, written in 1997 was the first English academic source for Bathory since McNally. Before this, Hungarian readers were able to read the work of Irma Szadeczky-Kardoss, who in 1993 wrote her dissertation on Bathory and her trial.²³ Because of the timing of his work, Thorne was able to interview Szadeczky-Kardoss and disseminate in his book her main argument. In essence, she took the position of defense counsel for the Countess and found that the case against Bathory had nearly no evidence, suggesting that

²¹ McNally, *Dracula was a Woman*, 72.

²² McNally, *Dracula was a Woman*, 29.

²³ Thorne, *Countess Dracula*, 188.

she would have been acquitted in a modern court room, if not found innocent.²⁴ Her work can still be found as a reference for popular blog and online article entries. Most of these articles follow a particular theme, the example of the Countess as a much maligned historical figure who was the victim of a foreign king and a sexist environment. What changes between the online articles is merely the degree to which they support the foreign king or sexism. But why would any nation want to be tied to her, and why make such an effort to redeem her?

For Hungary, reclaiming the Countess has several nationalistic elements; first of all, right now a few countries may lay claim to her because of shifting borders over the centuries: Slovakia, where Castle Cjeste was; Romania, which was the seat of the senior branch of the Bathory house when it was the Principality of Transylvania; and of course Hungary, with which she identified ethnically and linguistically. Because of the questions regarding her guilt and the possibility that she was the victim of a political conspiracy, Bathory was romanticized as a possibly redeemable figure who may be connected with her national hero husband in a positive light. Since the establishment of an agreed history as well as historical figures that shape the character of a nation are vital to a nation's culture, the competition to claim the Countess is understandable. Even if she was not redeemed, her legend draws in tourists, which has always been an economic bonus.

As well as giving insight into Hungarian perceptions of Bathory, Thorne's work stood on its own to significantly place the Countess within the realm of scholarly inquiry; *Countess Dracula* did more to make Bathory's case a viable subject within Western academia than any of the other later works combined -- despite his assertion that his book

²⁴ Thorne, *Countess Dracula*, 188.